



## COMMUNAL RIOTS DURING CONGRESS MINISTRIES

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After the elections of 1937, the situation was clear. In all Hindu constituencies of U.P. Congress gained overwhelming victory much beyond expectations, while in Muslim constituencies they did not secure any success. These conditions gave rise to special efforts on the part of Muslims to organize mass contact campaign conducted by Muslims alone. For no other was considered capable enough to successfully direct such a campaign. One such was launched by the direction of Mohammad Ashraf - a socialist.<sup>86</sup> Such activities created lack of trust and doubt in both the parties against the other. A big gulf was created between the Hindus and the Muslims who were moving apart from each other. It seemed nothing could bridge this gap. The natural consequence was that henceforth mass contact programmes under Muslim leadership were organized. But the social and economic contents of these campaigns were not at all indicative of any positive results. The reward of such attempts could be classed as belated and of no positive value. Another very visible consequence was spurts of riots that broke out in U.P.

The critical remarks made at the political meetings by the leaders of both the communities helped to widen the gulf between Hindus and Muslims. On the occasion of Pandit Govind Ballhad Pant's visit to Kanpur, a meeting of about 50,000 Muslims was held under the Presidentship of Dr. Abdul Samad MLA President of the District Muslim League in the Muslim High School grounds at which a resolution was passed expressing "no confidence in the Congress Ministry of the Province and, affirming the boycott of the functions, connected with the premier's visit. Almost all Muslim shops remained closed." The following resolution was passed at the meeting- "In view of the fact that the present Govt. has totally ignored the claims of genuine Muslim representation on the cabinet and refused to entertain the amendment of the Muslim members of the Assembly on the constitutional resolution, embodying the safeguards of Muslim rights, the Muslims of Cawnpore do not have any confidence in the present government and consequently they express their inability to participate in any functions relating to reception during the official visit of the Premier to Cawnpore." Several speeches were made criticizing the Congress Ministry and setting aside the Muslim demands. The mover of the resolution said that Muslims did not want to be puppets in the hands of Mahatma Gandhi. Another speaker said the Congress Ministry in United Provinces had created four new posts but not one had gone to a Muslim. Most of the speakers affirmed confidence in Mr. Jinnah who they said was the true representative of the Muslims.



Pandit Bal Krishna Sharma, President City Congress Committee, issued the following statement to the press: I had so far refrained from saying any thing regarding the communal situation in the city, specially because I do not believe in raising alarms, which disturb the normal life of the city. But recent developments have made it incumbent upon me to utter a word of warning to all those 'whom it may concern.'

"Those Muslims who fail to see eye to eye with their nationalist co-religionists have begun to resort to strange methods of political opposition. A regular campaign of hatred, violence and social ostracism against Muslims and against Congressmen has been going on for some time, open threats of stabbing, shoe-bedding and nose cutting have been uttered at public meetings. These goondas clerical in the community encouraged to threaten and harass those stalwart Muslims who think from the communalists

"If the situation is allowed to develop unchecked, rioting may break out any moment, a riot broke out in Kanpur on 6th Feb., 1938, when Minister for communication Hafiz Mohammad Ibrahim visited the city. Muslim League decided to boycott the celebrations and called upon the Muslims to observe hartal. When the procession reached Moulganj, the muslim demonstrators were shouting slogans

"Muslim League Zindbad, Ibrahim Saheb chale jao, Fahim Liddin ka nash ho," attacked the processionists. The police remained inactive. It was only after twenty minutes of rioting that the situation was put under control.

Besides the callous attitudes of the local police authority, the embittered feelings of both the communities were also one of the reasons for these outrages. Mr. Mohammad Jamey, President City Muslim League, expressed the similar view before the enquiry Commission set up to investigate the affair. He said, support of my statement that the Congress bore grudge against the Muslim League I would point out to the writings of their President Pt. Bal Krishna Sharma in the papers about strained feelings between the two parties and injuries to cows etc. These statements were directed doubtlessly against Muslims in general but the majority of the Muslims in Cawnpore are Muslim Leaguers 1890

Another factor, which the above instances throw light upon is that the mass contact movement started by the Congress made a certain section of Muslims believe that the Congress is trying to destroy Muslim solidarity through this movement. A number of Muslims had been employed to fight their coreligionists by the political party which was predominantly Hindu.

Communal feelings had been hardened and the mass of Muslims in Kanpur no longer trusted any Hindu leader or indeed any Muslim leader associated with the Hindu Congress. This was reflected in the clashes occurred on 6th Sept. 1938 between the Muslims and the Muslim Leaguers resulting in one person being seriously injured and four receiving minor injuries.

The clash was the outcome of the speeches delivered by Muslim leaders which were pro-Congress in tone. On the other hand Hindus thought that the



preponderance of muslims in the police force in Kanpur should not continue for a single day more specially in view of the behaviour of the Muslim police during the recent communal riots in Kanpur. The Committee of the U.P. Chamber of Commerce, in a letter to the Secretary to the Government suggested that in a preponderating hindu City like Kanpur, it is most unreasonable that the muslims should form a majority of the police force. inc proportion of hindus in the city police force should be immediately incruased in proportion to the Hindu population and also an adequate increase be effected in the police force according to the needs of the city. Raghubar Dayal Bhatt in a letter to Mr. Chindman, dated 18th May 1936, said, the numbers of Hindus in the police department is so insignificant that it may well be said that minority community having usurped the majority has become all in all. In a word, instead of British rule. Muslim rule is at Cawnpore in the police The Hindus have no voice in this department and their proper rights are crushed down in the broad day light....

The communal acrimony continued to prevail in the city till the end of the decade. Fresh riots broke but in the city on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1939 and lasted for four days. Forty two persons were killed and about 200 persons were injured. Though the situation was soon put under control and normal conditions were restored yet no amicable settlement could be brought about.

Within four months of this mishap the city once again witnessed the sorry spectacle of communal frenzy and bloodshed. According to a magisterial communiqué issued on 19th June at 1 p.m. the trouble started by brickbat throwing at 7 p.m. on Meston Road on the procession of Shri Jagannath. The police and the magistrate had to fire on three occasions. The procession was escorted from the scenes of disturbance. Houses were searched and arrests were made. The trouble was mainly confined to the area. But there were a few other cases of assault in areas not far away from the main scene of trouble.

Apparently it appears that the cause of this outbreak was traditional the question of music before mosque. But a through investigation revealed that besides this religious cause, goonda element were also responsible for creating disturbances. The locality (Meston Road and Moulganj ) through which the procession was passing the very locality in which a fantastic objection had been raised to playing of gramophone in the Kailash Hotel. It was there that the brickai showered. Dr. Jawaharlal, speaking in the Legislative Assembly on July 14, 1939, on the motion for adjournment to discuss the firing by police at Kanpur on 19th July, 1939, expressed the views that the stones were thrown from the house of a prostitute residing in that locality, which took a communal turn.

This gave currency to provocative and alarmist reports and further complicated the situation. Muslims went to the extent of saying that the Congress Government wanted to turn Kanpur into Palestine. In the spreading of the trouble exodus from danger zones by both the communities commenced and many persons left the city by train.



These outbreaks adversely affected the economy of the city. Mr. T.J.C. Acton, Commissioner Allahabad Division, in the course of his review of the administration of the Kanpur Municipality based on the annual report of the Kanpur Municipal Board, for the year ending March 1939, observed; It is evident that the deterioration in revenue has been due to the labour strikes in May, June and July 1938 and communal riots in February and March 1939.” It was noticed that with the exception of collection of terminal tax by the railway from which the receipts increased during the year in question (being unaffected by strikes of communal riots in Cawnpore City) there was a decrease in almost all other sources of income mainly due to communal riots and labour strikes. The labour strike which caused stoppage of mills and the communal riots adversely affected figures of demand as well as collection within nine months, third communal riot occurred in the city over the question of music before mosque. On October 24th, the Ramlila procession started according to the understanding given by the District Magistrate to the Hindu deputation that morning, that the old route and timings would be observed. As settled, the procession started at the usual time and nothing happened till it reached Subzimandi. At about 5.20 p.m. contrary to the usual practice it was stopped by the district authorities near the mosque. The procession protested against this high handed arbitrary action of district magistrate, but no head was paid to it. The processionist then squatted on the ground and refused to move. But when mutually agreed, the procession started at 7.30 p.m. brickbats were thrown at it by the Muslims who had gathered in a lane from where the police suddenly withdrew with the result that disturbances and disorder ensued. Both the parties tried to give it a communal colour. The working committee of the Hindu Sangh passed a number of resolutions condemning the action of the district magistrate in stopping the Bharatmilap procession near Subzirnandi mosque.

The working committee considered that the action of the district magistrate was the root cause of the trouble that followed with more patience and tact, he would have avoided the unfortunate consequences. The Sangh alleged that police arrangements at the lane near the mosque leading to Butcherkhana, which is the recurrent source of trouble and from where trouble should have been anticipated as it did occur, were quite inadequate and that even a few constables posted there withdrew immediately before the throwing of brickbats. The Sangh further alleged that had the Muslim goondas not commenced throwing brickbats without any provocation whatever and had not a Muslim youth fired, as it is reported at the Hindu crowd, no disturbance or disorder would have occurred.

The Muslim League statement states that the Muslims showed a market spirit of tolerance throughout the whole Ram lila processions despite excitement created by the shouting of slogans. The statement placed the whole blame on the Hindus for the riot and accused the procession of purposely delaying the Bharat Milap procession in spite of the authorities' efforts to the contrary. It



said that the procession reached the Subzimandi mosque at the time of prayer and that the Muslims inspite of shouting of slogans and music remained peaceful which continued till the time of the Isha prayers. It alleged that when the muslims were proceeding to the mosque for prayers brickbat throwing commenced.

Thus the public acts of strife, which contributed so greatly to the growth of feeling of 'separatism and antagonism' between the communities. were demonstrated till the end of the decade under study and in 1941. The government of U.P. felt justified in describing Kanpur as 'the most communal place in the providence. Visiting the city, was met at the station by some 50000 Muslim shouting not only 'Allah-o-Akbar' but also 'Pakistan zindabad'.

#### **References**

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